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C O N F I D E N T I A L SANAA 001346

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [KAWC](#) [PHUM](#) [KMPI](#) [ECON](#)

SUBJECT: FM DISCUSSES KORAN DESECRATION, PRESS LAW, SALEH
VISIT

REF: A. SANAA 1311

[B. SANAA 1054](#)

[C. SANAA 1301](#)

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas C. Krajeski for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[¶11. \(C\) Summary.](#) On May 18 Ambassador met with Foreign Minister Abubakr al-Qirbi. Discussions centered on the release of a Yemeni detainee from GTMO (ref A), ROYG response to Koran desecration allegations, Ambassador's canceled meeting with Yemeni journalists, and Saleh's proposed visit to Washington.

ROYG Response to Koran Desecration Allegations

[¶12. \(C\)](#) Ambassador thanked Qirbi for his controlled response to allegations that Guantanamo interrogators desecrated the Holy Koran, praising his measured and objective public response for helping to prevent the sort of violent public reaction seen in Pakistan and Afghanistan. He ensured Qirbi that even with Newsweek's retraction, the USG continues to take the issue very seriously, and intends to investigate any such allegation thoroughly. Ambassador added that the USG considers the desecration of any religious text to be an abhorrent act.

Concerns over Embassy's Relationship with Press

[¶13. \(C\)](#) Pulling Ambassador aside for a one-on-one, Qirbi expressed ROYG concern over Ambassador's May 14 scheduled meeting with 14 leading Yemeni journalists and ROYG officials to discuss a draft amendment to Yemeni press law (ref B). The meeting was canceled shortly before it was to take place, when Saleh convoked Ambassador (ref C). Ambassador stressed that the canceled meeting was intended to be a forum to address media issues including press freedoms and the new press law. (Comment: Saleh is very sensitive about Embassy contacts with the press and follows personally meetings between even junior EmbOffs and journalists. Without jumping to conclusions, President Saleh did not raise any new or immediate issues in the last minute May 15 meeting he called with Ambassador that led to the cancellation of Ambassador's meeting with the press syndicate. At the end of the meeting, Saleh told Ambassador that he was aware of the press lunch and the Ambassador's need to return to the Embassy. When Ambassador said he had to cancel the lunch, Saleh only smiled. End Comment.)

Saleh's Proposed Visit to Washington

[¶14. \(C\)](#) Ambassador confirmed to the FM that the White House still hopes to schedule President Saleh's visit for late September, before the beginning of Ramadan, but that the Presidency should also keep in mind late November as an alternative. Qirbi expressed his desire to work closely with the Ambassador on the key bilateral issues in the run-up to the visit. Ambassador agreed that thorough preliminary work on issues including counter-terrorism, controlling SA/LW, economic and democratic reform, and the protection of human rights would maximize the effectiveness of the meeting.
Krajeski